

S.22 - The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act

A 21st Century GI Bill for a New Generation of Veterans



The following packet includes:

- **Factsheet on “Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act” (S.22)**
- **Current S.22 Senate Cosponsors**
- **Section by Section Summary of “Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act” (S.22)**
- **Comparison Chart: Senate World War II Veterans and the GI Bill**
- **Articles of Interest**
 - **“Fighting for An Education,” The Virginian Pilot, May 10, 2007**
 - **“VFW Rallies for Better GI Bill Benefits,” The Military Times, June 13, 2007**
- **Editorials of Interest**
 - **“A Post-Iraq G.I. Bill” Op-ed by Senators Jim Webb and Chuck Hagel, The New York Times, November 9, 2007**
 - **“Reward for Service: Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan deserve an improved GI bill” Editorial, The Washington Post, November 11, 2007**
 - **“We Need a New GI Bill” Op-Ed by Jerome Kohlberg, The Wall Street Journal, January 25, 2008**
 - **“Update the GI Bill” Editorial, The Roanoke Times, May 13, 2007**

FACTS ABOUT SENATOR WEBB'S GI BILL, POST-9/11 VETERANS EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE ACT (S.22)

February 2008

SUMMARY

The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act, S.22, is designed to expand the educational benefits that our nation offers to the brave men and women who have served us so honorably since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The bill would mirror the educational benefits provided to veterans returning from World War II. A House companion bill, H.R. 2702, was introduced by Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA).

BACKGROUND

Our country has a tradition – since World War II – of offering educational assistance to returning veterans. In the 1940s, the first “GI Bill” helped transform notions of equality in American society. The World War II GI bill paid for veterans’ tuition, books, fees, a monthly stipend, and other training costs. Approximately 7.8 million veterans used the benefits given under the original GI bill in some form, out of a wartime veteran population of 15 million. For every dollar invested in veterans, seven dollars were generated.

Over the last several decades, Congress passed a number of other GI bills that also gave educational benefits to veterans. However, benefits awarded under those subsequent bills have not been as expansive as our nation’s original GI bill. Currently, veterans’ educational benefits are administered under the Montgomery GI Bill. This program is designed for peacetime – not wartime – service.

MAJOR PROVISIONS

- Increased educational benefits would be available to members of the military who have served on active duty since September 11, 2001. To qualify, veterans must have served at least two years of active duty, with at least some period of active duty time served beginning on or after September 11, 2001.
- The bill provides for educational benefits to be paid for a duration of time linked to time served in the military. Generally, veterans would not receive assistance for more than a total of 36 months, which equals four academic years.
- Benefits provided under the bill would allow veterans pursuing an approved program of education to receive payments covering the established charges of their program, and a monthly stipend of \$1,000. The bill would allow additional payments for tutorial assistance, as well as licensure and certification tests. Benefit payments would be limited to the costs of the most expensive public institution in the state in which the veteran is enrolled.
- Veterans would have up to fifteen years, compared to ten years under the Montgomery GI bill, to use their educational assistance entitlement. Veterans would be barred from receiving concurrent assistance from this program and another similar program.

CO-SPONSORS, SUPPORTERS

The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2007, S.22, has 32 cosponsors in the Senate, including lead Republican co-sponsor Chuck Hagel (NE). The House companion bill, H.R. 2702, introduced by Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA), has 92 cosponsors in the House. (*As of February 11, 2008*)

The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2007 has been endorsed by the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), the Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA), the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States (EANGUS), the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), and the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC).

KEY POINTS MADE BY SENATOR WEBB

- **Currently, veterans' educational benefits are administered under the Montgomery GI Bill—a program designed primarily for peacetime – not wartime – service.** The demands placed on soldiers and sailors in this post 9/11 era are much greater than when Congress established the current program. With many of our military members serving two, three or four tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is past time to enact a new veterans' education program modeled on the World War II era GI bill.
- **The GI Bill of the World War II era sparked economic growth and expansion for a whole generation of Americans; a more robust GI bill holds the same potential for today's economy.** The United States has never erred when it has made sustained new investments in higher education and job training – and its veterans. Educated veterans have higher income levels, which in the long run increases tax revenues. Approximately 7.8 million veterans used the benefits in some form, out of a wartime veteran population of 15 million. For every dollar invested in WWII veterans, seven dollars were generated.
- **A strong and reliable GI bill will have a positive effect on military recruitment.**
- Better educated veterans have a **more positive readjustment experience** and lower levels of post-traumatic stress disorder.
- **The education of our nation's veterans is a cost of war.** A very small percentage of Americans have stepped forward to serve our country through military service; they have earned the right to have a bright future when they have completed their service. A GI bill that properly rewards honorable service is the right thing to do.
- **The estimated \$2 billion a year needed for the program equals one week of war in Iraq.**
- Three former Presidents, a dozen U.S. Senators, three Supreme Court Justices and fourteen Nobel Prize winners went to school on the GI Bill. Under today's Montgomery GI Bill, these same leaders would receive only a fraction of the money necessary to get the same level of education.

Current S. 22 Senate Cosponsors

1. Max Baucus (MT)
2. Evan Bayh (IN)
3. Joe Biden (CT)
4. Jeff Bingaman (NM)
5. Barbara Boxer (CA)
6. Sherrod Brown (OH)
7. Robert Casey (PA)
8. Hillary Clinton (NY)
9. Susan Collins (ME)
10. Byron Dorgan (ND)
11. Richard Durbin (IL)
12. Diane Feinstein (CA)
13. Chuck Hagel (NE)
14. Tom Harkin (IA)
15. Daniel Inouye (HI)
16. Tim Johnson (SD)
17. John Kerry (MA)
18. Mary Landrieu (LA)
19. Frank Lautenberg (NJ)
20. Blanche Lincoln (AR)
21. Claire McCaskill (MO)
22. Robert Menendez (NJ)
23. Barbara Mikulski (MD)
24. Barack Obama (IL)
25. Mark Pryor (AR)
26. Harry Reid (NV)
27. Bernard Sanders (VT)
28. Olympia Snowe (ME)
29. Debbie Stabenow (MI)
30. Jon Tester (MT)
31. Sheldon Whitehouse (RI)
32. Ron Wyden (OR)

**“Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act” (S.22)
Introduced by Sen. James Webb on January 4, 2007**

Section-by-Section Summary

Section 1: Short title – “Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act.”

Section 2: **Educational Assistance for Members of the Armed Forces Who Serve After September 11, 2001.** This section adds a new Chapter 33 (entitled “Post 9/11 Educational Assistance”) to Title 38 of the U.S. Code, with the following new sections:

Section 3301: **Definitions.** This section provides definitions of key terms.

Section 3311: **Educational assistance for service in the Armed Forces after September 11, 2001 – entitlement.** This section prescribes multiple categories of veterans entitled to educational benefits under this Act. In general, to qualify, veterans must have served at least two years of active duty, with at least some period of active duty time served beginning on or after September 11, 2001.

Section 3312: **Educational assistance – duration.** Veterans are entitled to receive educational assistance for a period of time that is linked to their entitlement, as measured by Section 3311 above. In general, veterans may not receive assistance for more than a total of 36 months, which equals 4 academic years.

Section 3313: **Educational assistance – payment and amount.** In general, veterans may receive monetary assistance to pursue an approved program of education as follows: (i) payments covering the established charges of the program, not to exceed the in-state tuition at the most expensive public university in the state the veteran is enrolled, (ii) room and board, and (iii) a monthly stipend of up to \$1,000. [Note that these are basically the same benefits paid to World War II veterans.] This Section prescribes the timing of such payments and revised payment guidelines related to less-than-half-time education, apprenticeships, on-the-job-training, correspondence school, and flight training.

Section 3314: **Tutorial assistance.** Veterans may receive additional payment for tutorial assistance, not to exceed \$100/month, for a maximum of 12 months, or until a maximum of \$1,200 is used.

Section 3315: **Licensure and certification tests.** Veterans may receive payment for one licensing or certification test, not to exceed the lesser of \$2,000 or the test fee.

Section 3321: **Time limitation for use of and eligibility for entitlement.** Veterans have 15 years (as measured under the provisions of this Section) to use their educational entitlement.

Section 3322: **Bar to duplication of educational assistance benefits.** Veterans who receive educational benefits under this Act may not receive concurrent assistance under another similar program; instead, veterans must elect one program over another.

Section 3323: **Administration.** This Section: (i) gives guidance on interpreting operative terms, and (ii) instructs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide information to veterans regarding this Act's educational benefits, and to prescribe regulations to carry out this Act.

Section 3324: **Allocation of administration and costs.** The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall administer this program, and payments shall be made from funds made available to the Department of Veterans Affairs for the payment of readjustment benefits. This Section also prescribes ways for veterans to choose to elect into this Act's program from the existing Montgomery G.I. Bill program.

SENATE WORLD WAR II VETERANS AND THE G.I. BILL

SENATOR	Educational Institution & Degree Funded by the G.I. Bill	2006-07 Cost of Annual IN STATE tuition, fees, books & room and board (On Campus)	2006-07 tuition, fees, books & room and board CURRENTLY covered under Montgomery G.I. Bill
Akaka	University of Hawaii, 1952 Undergraduate Degree	\$14,456	\$6,000* (41.5%)
Inouye (cosponsor)	University of Hawaii, 1950 Undergraduate Degree	\$14,456	\$6,000 (41.5%)
	George Washington Law School Juris Doctor Degree	\$48,460	\$6,000 (12.4%)
Lautenberg (cosponsor)	Columbia, 1949 Undergraduate Degree	\$46,874	\$6,000 (12.8%)
Stevens	UCLA, 1947 Undergraduate Degree	\$22,773	\$6,000 (26.3%)
	Harvard Law School, 1950 Juris Doctor Degree	\$54,066	\$6,000 (11.1%)
Warner	Washington & Lee, 1949 Undergraduate Degree	\$42,327	\$6,000 (14.2%)
	University of Virginia Law School, 1953		
	Juris Doctor Degree	\$44,800	\$6,000 (13.4%)

* Average annual MGIB payment in FY '07, according to the Department of Veterans' Affairs, is \$6,000. The maximum annual benefit under the current MGIB payment is \$9,900.

MILITARY | **GI BILL OVERHAUL**

FIGHTING FOR AN EDUCATION

The GI Bill once put veterans through college. Now, it serves as more of a down payment. Sen. Jim Webb aims to close that gap.

FROM STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

WASHINGTON — Sen. Jim Webb, D-Va., carried through on a campaign promise Wednesday, lobbying a Senate committee to pay college tuition and a monthly stipend to veterans who have served on active duty since the 2001 terrorist attacks.

Webb, a former Marine and a Navy secretary, argued that pro-

viding today's veterans with a GI Bill similar to what World War II-era veterans received would boost recruiting, ease the transition of soldiers returning from war and raise the quality of life for those who have risked their lives.

Webb proposes paying tuition, room and board and a \$1,000 monthly stipend to veterans who have served on active duty for at

least two years.

"I hope that in good spirit, the administration will look at this in terms of how we really should be rewarding the people who step forward," he told the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. "It's a very small percentage of the country that's done this, and they

Please see GI Bill, Page A10

WHAT VETERANS GET

\$38,700

That's the maximum a veteran, currently enrolled and who served on active duty, can qualify for during a college career.

WHAT COLLEGE COSTS

\$51,184

That's the cost of a four-year degree based on the current one-year average for tuition, room and board at a four-year public institution.

In Virginia, the cost is slightly higher at \$52,788.

At private schools, the cost tops \$120,000.

HOW MANY ARE HELPED

Veterans Affairs distributed \$2.76 billion in education aid to 498,123 people last year.

SEN. WEBB'S PROPOSAL

It would guarantee tuition, room and board plus a \$1,000 monthly stipend to veterans who have served on active duty for at least two years since Sept. 11, 2001.

Next The Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs is expected to take up the bill next month.

GI Bill: Benefits have eroded over time

Continued from Page A1

deserve the right to have as big a future as they can go out and get."

Kimberly Hunter, a spokeswoman for Webb, said there is no estimate yet of how much the expanded benefit would cost. The proposal is backed by several veterans' groups, including The American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

The committee is expected to take up the bill next month.

Congress has boosted the GI benefit several times since its inception — the last a \$9 billion, 10-year increase passed in 2001 that even then was criticized as too small to keep up with soaring costs.

The Department of Veterans Affairs, which administers the program, distributed \$2.76 billion in education aid to 498,123 people last year.

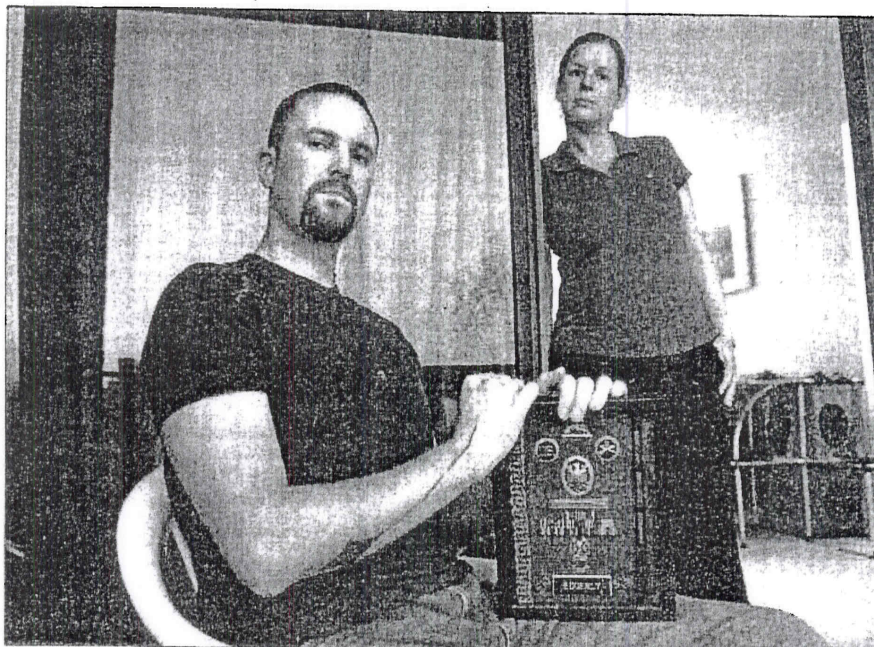
While that amount is substantial, it falls short of the original program's scope.

The maximum GI Bill amount a currently enrolled veteran who served on active duty can qualify for during a college career is roughly \$38,700. But for many students, that is not nearly enough to pay for tuition, room, board and books. Plus, the GI Bill covers only four years of school, leaving veterans on their own if they take longer to graduate.

The average cost of one year's tuition, room and board at four-year public institutions in 2006-07 was \$12,796, according to the College Board. For private schools, the one-year cost was \$30,367. Tuition and fees at all schools have risen an average of 35 percent in the past five years, while the highest GI Bill monthly payout has increased only 20 percent.

In Virginia this year, the average tuition at four-year public institutions, including room and board, was \$13,197, according to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia. It is a 7.7 percent increase over last year. The tuition at public two-year colleges also has climbed, up 6.3 percent over last year. The average tuition at the state's community colleges is \$2,269.

Virginia Gov. Timothy M. Kaine in March signed into law a bill that reduces college tuition for the state's active-



JACQUELYN MARTIN/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Marc Edgerly, above with his fiancée Jen Freeman, is enrolled in the GI Bill program while attending George Mason University. He says he will be left with about \$50,000 in student loans when he graduates.

ITS ORIGIN

President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the GI Bill, officially called the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, in 1944, largely to keep millions of demobilized World War II soldiers from flooding the job market. By 1956, 7.8 million servicemen had used the benefit for college or vocational training.

duty members, activated National Guard or reservist members, or those mobilized or on temporary active duty for six months or more.

The change, which takes effect July 1, ensures that tuition costs for those service members attending a public college in Virginia won't rise higher than the amount covered by their military services Tuition Assistance program or the school's in-state tuition rate, whichever is greater.

Big student loans are not uncommon among college students in general; the average graduate now leaves school with \$19,000 in loans.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the GI Bill, officially called the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, in 1944, largely to keep millions of demobilized World War II soldiers from flooding the job market.

By 1956, 7.8 million servicemen had used the benefit for college or vocational training.

Veterans initially received about \$500 per year, enough to pay for tuition, room and books at most colleges, according to Keith Olson, a University of Maryland professor who wrote a book on the GI Bill. But the purchasing power of the GI Bill benefits has eroded over the years.

To enroll, troops must buy in to the program. Their pay is reduced by \$1,200 during the first year of service, and then they must serve their full enlistment period. Those who serve three years or more are eligible for the full benefit of \$1,075 per month. Some may qualify for additional money provided by their military branch, known as a GI Bill "kicker."

Despite its original largesse, some veterans aren't sure the GI Bill should pay for the entire cost of their education.

Carl Edgerly, 55, served for three years in the Army, including a year in Vietnam. Now an accountant for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, he is also a lieutenant colonel in the National Guard scheduled for a tour in Iraq.

Edgerly worked full time while he was on the GI Bill, and

received \$374 per month in GI Bill benefits. He attended Bismarck Junior College and then University of Mary College, both in Bismarck, N.D.

Despite the costs his son faces, Edgerly said he believes the program is meant to give a soldier a "head start" rather than a free ride in college.

His son agrees — somewhat. Marc Edgerly enlisted in a burst of patriotism following Sept. 11, 2001, and spent four years in the Army's Old Guard, serving on honor guards at Arlington National Cemetery.

Now at George Mason University, Edgerly also works part time as a security guard at \$12.50 per hour. His yearly tuition bill is about \$7,000. He and his fiancée pay around \$1,200 monthly for a small apartment near campus in the high-rent Washington suburb.

He expects to find a well-paying job as an engineer after he graduates, which should help to repay his loans. And he has a big incentive to stay in school.

"My fiancée says she won't marry me if I don't get a college degree," he said.

This story was compiled from reports by staff writer Amy Couteé and The Associated Press.

THE MILITARY TIMES

VFW rallies for better GI Bill benefits

By Rick Maze

Jun 13, 2007

The head of a major veterans' group is trying to rally his membership to get Congress to pass a promised overhaul of GI Bill education benefits.

Gary Kurpius, commander of Veterans of Foreign Wars, the nation's largest organization for combat veterans, is pushing for Congress to pass S 22, a bill introduced in January by Sen. Jim Webb, D-Va., that would pay full tuition plus a monthly stipend for veterans attending college full time.

Kurpius has asked VFW members to contact their members of Congress to urge their support for the bill.

Additionally, Webb's bill — the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2007 — would eliminate the \$1,200 fee charged for enrolling in the GI Bill and would give veterans up to 15 years after they leave the service to use their benefits, five more than currently allowed.

The bill is pending before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, which could take up the measure as early as June 27. A partisan fight over the measure is possible — Democrats have rallied around Webb's bill, while Republicans have expressed doubts because no money has been set aside for the added benefits in the Democrat-passed budget plan for 2008.

"The Montgomery G.I. Bill was enacted two decades ago, but now we're involved in the longest combat operation with an all-volunteer force in our nation's history," Kurpius said. "Our troops have earned a new G.I. Bill that is based on 21st-century realities."

A Post-Iraq G.I. Bill

By JIM WEBB and CHUCK HAGEL

November 9, 2007

New York Times Op-Ed

MEMBERS of Congress and other political leaders often say that the men and women who have served in our military since 9/11 are the “new greatest generation.” Well, here’s a thought from two infantry combat veterans of the Vietnam era’s “wounded generation”: if you truly believe that our Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are like those who fought in World War II, let us provide them with the same G.I. Bill that was given to the veterans of that war.

In terms of providing true opportunity, the World War II G.I. Bill was one of the most important pieces of legislation in our history. It paid college tuition and fees, bought textbooks and provided a monthly stipend for eight million of the 16 million who served. Many of our colleagues in the Senate who before the war could never have dreamed of college found themselves at some of the nation’s finest educational institutions.

Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey went to Columbia on the G.I. bill; John Warner of Virginia to Washington and Lee and the University of Virginia Law School; Daniel Inouye of Hawaii to the University of Hawaii and the George Washington University Law School; and Ted Stevens of Alaska to the University of California, Los Angeles, and Harvard Law School.

Veterans today have only the Montgomery G.I. Bill, which requires a service member to pay \$100 a month for the first year of his or her enlistment in order to receive a flat payment for college that averages \$800 a month. This was a reasonable enlistment incentive for peacetime service, but it is an insufficient reward for wartime service today. It is hardly enough to allow a veteran to attend many community colleges.

It would cover only about 13 percent of the cost of attending Columbia, 42 percent at the University of Hawaii, 14 percent at Washington and Lee, 26 percent at U.C.L.A. and 11 percent at Harvard Law School.

College costs have skyrocketed, and a full G.I. Bill for those who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan would be expensive. But Congress has recently appropriated \$19 billion next year for federal education grants purely on the basis of financial need. A G.I. Bill for those who have given so much to our country, often including repeated combat tours, should be viewed as an obligation.

We must put together the right formula that will demonstrate our respect for those who have stepped forward to serve in these difficult times. First-class service to country deserves first-class appreciation.

Jim Webb, Democrat of Virginia, and Chuck Hagel, Republican of Nebraska, are United States senators.

Reward for Service

Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan deserve an improved GI bill.

Sunday, November 11, 2007

Washington Post Editorial

NEARLY A CENTURY after the end of the war that was supposed to end all wars, tens of thousands of Americans are fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. The sacrifices of these brave men and women imbue Veterans Day with special meaning. It requires more than pausing between shopping and football to say thank you.

For example: Lasting fixes are needed for the treatment, rehabilitation and compensation of the returning wounded. The crisis in care and disability has been well-publicized, and it's time Congress act on the recommendations of a bipartisan commission formed in the aftermath of a Post investigation of Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Similarly, there is a need to reform the antiquated system of education benefits afforded the men and women in the U.S. military. A bill sponsored by Sens. James Webb (D-Va.) and Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.) has focused attention on the inadequacies of a program designed for peacetime, not wartime, service.

The legislation would give veterans of the Sept. 11 era the kind of educational benefits afforded service members at the end of World War II in the first GI bill. Veterans who have served on active duty for at least two years would receive tuition, room and board, and a monthly stipend.

Even though Congress has made changes to the GI benefit several times since its inception, the expansion has not kept pace with the increased costs of college. For example, the maximum a veteran can receive under the current program is about \$1,100 per month for four years, or roughly \$38,000. The benefits pale in comparison to the actual costs of going to college. There are other problems with the current system, such as how it shortchanges members of the National Guard and reserves who serve combat tours.

Backers of the bill put the cost at \$2 billion, but others place it much higher. It's important to calculate the real cost and figure out where the money will come from. But Mr. Webb is right when he argues that the education of the nation's veterans must be considered a cost of war and one that the nation can't afford not to pay.

We Need a New GI Bill

By Jerome Kohlberg

January 25, 2008

The Wall Street Journal Op-Ed

New York State Gov. Eliot Spitzer deserves the highest praise for his powerful commitment to the thousands of New York citizen soldiers fighting in the Iraq and Afghanistan war theaters. In his State of the State address this month, he proposed guaranteeing a full-tuition scholarship to these heroic men and women, so that they may attend any State University of New York or City University of New York college or university upon their return.

Mr. Spitzer's initiative should serve as a paradigm for what our nation must do for this new generation of veterans. They have sacrificed so much for us. We owe them honor, respect and the opportunity for a brighter future. We owe them a new GI Bill assuring them a college education.

When my service in the U.S. Navy ended after World War II, America welcomed me home with just such an opportunity: the G.I. Bill of 1944. In those days, veterans' benefits were generous -- the old saying was that if you got into Harvard, the G.I. Bill would pay for Harvard. This legislation allowed me to earn a bachelor's degree from Swarthmore College, a business degree from Harvard, and a law degree from Columbia.

I was among the almost eight million veterans -- more than half of us who returned home safely -- who were suddenly able to pay for the college or university of our choice. Many had never dreamed of going to college before the war.

This unprecedented educational opportunity transformed American society, as a whole generation of blue collar workers became engineers, doctors, lawyers, teachers and entrepreneurs. The economy boomed as we entered the workforce with new skills and training that increased productivity and stimulated innovation.

Sixty years after Pearl Harbor, a new generation of young men and women has now enlisted in the service of our nation. Regardless of our political differences about the war, we must be united in deep appreciation of the exceptional sacrifices made by our brave troops in Afghanistan and Iraq. This includes thousands of members of the Reserve and National Guard, most of whom have also served multiple tours of duty half a world away from their homes and families.

Unfortunately, the educational benefits that were available to WWII-era veterans are no longer afforded to today's returning troops. The sad reality is that while the cost of an education has increased, the benefits available to veterans have not kept up. Today, the GI Bill pays just a fraction of the cost of getting a degree.

Consider, for example, that the maximum educational benefit available to veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan is just \$1,101 per month, or \$39,636 over four years. Those veterans who served combat tours with the National Guard or Reserves are eligible for even less -- typically just \$440 per month. The College Board reports that the average four-year public college costs more than \$65,000 for an in-state student, while a private university costs upwards of \$133,000.

Moreover, once National Guard and Reserve members leave the military, they are no longer eligible for any benefits. And if service members are discharged because of a disability, their GI Bill benefits are limited to only the equivalent number of months they served, even if their discharge was the result of injuries suffered in combat.

This is as unbelievable as it is unjust.

The severe restrictions of the current GI Bill extend beyond the educational benefit. There is an initial, non-refundable buy-in cost of \$1,200 just to be eligible. That is essentially a "combat tax" on 19- and 20-year-olds who are getting ready to put their lives on the line for our country.

Hard as it is to imagine, if they don't use their GI Bill benefits when they return, they never see that money again. Some 30% of veterans don't use any of their GI Bill funds, which translates into more than \$230 million going directly into the U.S. Treasury, rather than back to these young men and women.

War veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan must pay tuition, room and board and other college costs upfront out of their own pockets, and then are reimbursed up to their eligible benefit. In addition, benefits used under the GI Bill count against eligibility for federal student aid, with such support reduced if veterans receive any GI Bill funds. And there is a 10-year limit on assistance for current educational benefits.

All these restrictions effectively put the dream of higher education out of reach for far too many of the 1.6 million who have served our nation in the current wars.

I deeply believe that we have a moral responsibility to provide today's returning veterans with the same educational opportunities that my generation received. Mindful of that responsibility, many of us who benefited greatly from the original G.I. Bill have now established a private scholarship fund -- the Fund for Veterans' Education -- to offer the same "full boat" educational opportunities to returning veterans from all 50 states over the next 12 months.

To be sure, this is a limited effort that will only serve a relatively small number of returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. However, we view our program as a direct challenge to our elected officials in Washington. Just as President Roosevelt and the Congress did in 1944, they must now choose to commit the resources necessary to fund a comprehensive G.I. Bill for another generation of America's brave soldiers.

Sens. Jim Webb of Virginia, Chuck Hagel of Nebraska, and Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas have introduced legislation that would again make that sacred promise to our returning veterans: A promise that says, if you've put your life on the line to help secure America's future, your own educational future will never be in doubt.

Their legislation is good public policy and it is fiscally prudent. In the long run, a new G.I. Bill will more than pay for itself. As our experience proved after World War II, better educated veterans have higher income levels which, over the long run, will inevitably increase tax revenues. A congressionally mandated cost-benefit analysis concluded that for every \$1 invested in education under the original G.I. Bill of 1944, the nation received between \$5 and \$12 in economic benefits, such as increased tax revenue and heightened productivity.

In my lifetime, the original G.I. Bill was one of this nation's proudest accomplishments and one of its most solemn commitments. We must now renew that commitment to a new generation of men and women who have served our country with extraordinary courage and distinction. In so doing, they will achieve the better lives they so richly deserve. And we will secure a better America.

Mr. Kohlberg, a founding partner of Kohlberg Kravis Roberts and a limited partner of the private equity firm Kohlberg & Co., is chairman of the Fund For Veterans' Education.

Upgrade the GI Bill

Editorial, Roanoke Times

August 13, 2007

Virginia Democratic Sen. Jim Webb wants a renewed national commitment to the GI Bill to reward wartime service and sacrifice of soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines.

Webb would provide veterans a total average monthly benefit of \$2,400, far above today's \$1,075 maximum. And the cost of that has the Pentagon worried.

His plan would be a full ride --tuition and fees at four-year institutions at in-state rates, plus a \$1,000 monthly living stipend.

As recently as May, however, he had not provided cost estimates. The only independent estimate to date pegs it at \$75 billion over 10 years -- and that's real money even in Washington.

Too much, the Pentagon says. It's not only the cost, but also the concern that such a generous incentive would lead many bright young troops to leave earlier than they would otherwise in order to use the benefits.

But this plan has potential that merits a closer look.

The original post-World War II GI Bill sent millions of veterans to college and laid groundwork for the middle class boom. But over the years, it was allowed to erode in value, which might not have been a critical issue in the long twilight peacetime of the Cold War.

But against the backdrop of the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, it no longer fits. In a wartime environment, such a package might also attract a different type of recruit enticed not only by the idea of getting a top-flight education, but also by the idea of coming out the other end with a debt-free degree.

Webb needs to figure out a way to pay for this. Is it possible the services could offset some of the cost by reducing the use of large enlistment bonuses and offer the enhanced GI Bill as an alternative?

A different incentive mix might yield a different kind of recruit. It's time to overhaul the GI Bill for a new force in a new war in a new century.